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A PARTING AND A MEETING

BY

W. D. HOWELLS





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“BURTON DROPPED THE REINS ALTOGETHER”

A PARTING AND A MEETING

Story

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

ILLUSTRATED



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ILLUSTRATIONS

- “BURTON DROPPED THE REINS ALTOGETHER” *Frontispiece*
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A PARTING AND A MEETING

I

THEY drove along in the old chaise, with the top down, under the bright forenoon sun. The June warmth had a hint of summer heat in it, but a light wind blew cool in their faces out of the northwest. It had rained over night, and the earth seemed washed as clean as the sky. Where the woods were cut away from the smoothly packed road, the laurel was coming in bloom; where the trees closed upon it the pine tufts purred, and the birch leaves sang in the breeze, so near that she had to put up

her hand to keep a bough from switching her in the face, now and then; the horse made snatches at the foliage, and from time to time champed thoughtfully on his bit, as if he fancied he might have caught a leaf in his mouth.

The young man held the lax rein in one hand, while he held closely in the other the hand of the young girl beside him. She seemed more conscious of what the horse was doing than he, and she returned his long gaze with eyes that made little flights of anxiety away from his, to the right and the left, and then settled back to the joy of dwelling on his face. It was the thin, aquiline face of New England; the cheek-bones were high, and touched with a color that kept itself pure, though his long hands were a country brown; his eyes were blue, and his hair pale yellow. His looks had no aquiline fierceness from

his profile, but only a gentle intensity, unless it might better be called a mild rapture.

The girl beside him sat pulled away into the corner of the chaise, and yet drawn towards him in a tender droop. Her face was somewhat narrow, and that made the corners of her pretty mouth show far into her cheeks. Her nose was tilted a little above it, but it was straight and fine from the tip upward; her eyes were set rather near together, and her forehead had the hair drawn low on it, and close to her mobile brows. A wide-fronted scoop-bonnet flared round her little head, with ribbons that fell to the waist of her very high-waisted green silk dress, made in the fashion of seventy years ago, with a skirt ending in closely-gathered ruffles a foot deep. The young man wore a blue coat with brass buttons, tight

sleeves, and a high quilted collar; he had passed several times round his throat a cambric cravat; and his pantaloons, closely-fitted to his legs, met his gaiters at the ankles. They were country people, and their costumes, which their figures gave distinction, were not those of the very moment in London and Paris.

II

HE was Roger Burton, and he had taught the academy at Birchfield for the past year. He was twenty-seven, and Chloe Mason was twenty. Her father was the doctor in Birchfield, and when Roger came up from Boston way to take the school, he spent a few days in the doctor's house, until he could find a settled boarding place. Chloe had been the head of the household since her mother's death, and she sat at the head of the table, and poured out Roger's tea without looking towards him, so that it could hardly be called love at sight in her. But they both fell in love with each other at once, and they began keeping company almost from the first.

Before the end of the first year it was known that they were engaged, but they were not really engaged till quite near the close of the spring term. Then she ran away from home for a little visit at her grandfather's in Medbury, to have a chance, she said, to think it over. As soon as the school closed he came after her; he told her that he came to help her think. She answered him, from the fright and joy his coming gave her, that this was a silly excuse, and she would hardly kiss him; but she let him stay till eleven o'clock, the night he arrived, before she drove him away to the tavern at the cross-roads where he had put up. She said she guessed he would get locked out if he was not careful; and, in fact, the landlord came down to let him in with his night-clothes on, but chewing tobacco as if it were high noon. That was

Friday night, and this was Saturday morning.

The horse and chaise were her grandfather's, and the squire told the young man that if he was not going anywhere in particular, and not in a hurry to get there, the horse was just the horse he wanted.

III

THEY started early, to be alone together as long as they could, and they let the horse loiter over the road at will. They were not always quite certain where they were, but again Chloe thought she knew; she used to be a great deal at her grandfather's when she was little, and every now and then she did really come to a place that she remembered.

As they lingered on the way, they talked without stopping a moment. Their love was yet so newly owned that they were full of delicious surprises for each other, whether they found out that they were alike in a thing, or unlike.

“What are you looking at so hard?” she asked, at one time, and a little quaver came into her voice, which almost died in her throat from emotion.

“What are *you* looking at so hard?” he demanded in turn; and they took a fresh hold upon each other’s hands.

“I am not looking at anything,” she said, and she let her glance flutter away from him to prove it.

“I am looking at something,” he said.

“I am looking at your mouth.”

“What for?” she tempted him.

“To see why it is so beautiful. I am glad it isn’t one of those shallow mouths, that seem just on the surface.”

He continued to study her face with a dreamy interest which she bore without blushing. “Features don’t seem to mean much of anything if you take them separately; and it’s the look in a face that keeps it together. I wonder

what it is makes your look? The soul, I suppose; the features don't, and it must be our souls that we care for in one another. Don't you believe so?"

"Yes; of course. It's you I care for; and I should care just as much for you if you were dead and gone, as I do now," said the girl.

"When you went away," he continued, "I tried to picture your face in my mind. But I couldn't. You were just something sweet and true, something dear and lovely; but you had no form."

"Well, *I* could see *you* as plain as if you stood before me all the time. And you were full as real."

"That is very curious." He resumed his contemplation of her face, from the muse he had fallen into. "How strange it all is. Is this you, Chloe, or is some-

thing else you? When I think of you—when I look at you—”

She suddenly lost her patience.

“Well, don’t look *so* at me!”

“How?”

“As if you didn’t see me!”

“But I do see you!”

“Well, then, *look* as if you did. Oh, look out for that horse!” The horse had turned abruptly out of the road towards a bit of pasturage near the wayside wall: the chaise hung by one wheel at the edge of the gully dividing the road from the grass that had taken his fancy. “In another minute we should have been tipped over. Do be careful, Roger!” she palpitated, after he had recalled the horse from his wanderings, and set out with him again on theirs. “If you can’t drive any better than that, you’d better let me.”

“Would you like to drive? You may!”

“If I did, I shouldn’t go to sleep over it. How absent-minded you are!”

“Don’t you like it?”

“I like—you. Oh, don’t! There’s a carriage coming! I should think you would be ashamed! Well—*there*, then! And I *know* they saw us!”

“I don’t believe they did. They were too far off. See! they are turning down another road.”

“Well, do behave, anyway!”

“May I put my arm around you?”

“No, I want to talk seriously with you, Roger; and I can’t think if you do that.”

“How strange that is! I wish you would explain why you can’t think if I put my arm around you. What do you do if you don’t think?”

“How silly! Feel, I presume.”

“Well, why not feel, then? Feeling is better than thinking, if love is feel-

ing, isn't it? But perhaps love is thinking, too."

"It ought to be," she sighed. "Or, at least, we ought to think about it."

"Well, let us think about it, then; I don't know a pleasanter subject. What do you suppose it really is? Why should I care so much for you, and nothing for another person? What is the law of it? For it must have a law. It wasn't blind chance that made us care for each other. You can't imagine our caring for any one else?"

"No. I can't imagine that at all—now."

"Now?"

"Why, I presume if I hadn't ever seen you—if you hadn't ever come to Birchfield—I might have got to caring for somebody else. Ira Dickerman, very likely." She pulled away to her corner of the chaise, and looked at

him with mocking laughter in her eyes.

The young man turned his face away, and she looked forward and peered up into it to see if she had vexed him. But he only said, rather sadly: "Ira is smart. He will make a good lawyer. He is more practical than I am. Your father would rather have had him, Chloe."

"Father can have him yet, if he wants him," said the girl, and they both laughed. "*I* don't. But I guess you can be practical enough—if you want to."

"You're afraid I shan't want to. Is that what you're going to be serious about?"

"Not unless you wish I should, Roger," she answered, fondly.

"I do wish you should. How do you think I could be more practical?"

“Well, grandfather thinks you might study law while you’re teaching; *he* did. And I don’t believe he cares much for writing poetry—There! *I* like it! And I presume they all think—”

“What?”

“That you’re rather notional.”

Roger sighed.

“I presume I shall always be a school-master. I shall never be very well off, nor get into Congress—like Ira.”

“Now, if you keep bringing up Ira Dickerman—”

“I won’t. But I know they’d rather—Well, I won’t say it! And they’re right about me. I know I’m notional.” He was silent long enough to let her deny that he was notional at all; and then he said: “There is one thing that troubles me, Chloe. Last night I got to thinking— Now, this will make you angry!”

“No, go on!” said the girl, and she took a firmer grip of his hand to reassure him.

“You know what our thoughts are, and how they won’t be commanded? Well, last night I didn’t sleep much. I got to thinking about love.” She blushed a little, and her hand trembled in his.

“There’s something in me—I don’t know how to explain it exactly—that makes me hate to have things fade out, and die out, the way they all seem to do. I should like to get something that would last. Now, the way I look at married people, their love doesn’t seem to have lasted. They’re good friends—sometimes, and I don’t know but most of the time—but something’s gone, and it seems to be their love. How did it go? When did it begin to go? It seems now to be the whole of life, and if life went on anywhere else, love ought to

go on with it. If we can't think how it had a beginning—and I can't; it seems to me as if I always cared for you—”

“That's just the way it seems to me, too,” she murmured.

“Why, then, it oughtn't to be possible for it to have an end.”

“No.”

Something in her tone made him look up at her, for he had been talking with a downward glance, in the way he had, and now he saw her chin trembling. He was beginning, “Do you believe;” but he ended, “I don't believe our love will pass away; I can't believe it.”

She made two or three trials before she could harden herself to say: “I don't see how we're different from other folks.”

“But we *can* be different. We can say, here and now, that we will love each

other so that our love will never die as long as we live, can't we? Let us think. Of course, I know that you are beautiful, and I do love your beauty." She gave a little sob, and he said, "Oh, don't!"

She pulled her hand away to make search for her handkerchief. "It isn't anything. I can't help it. I presume I like *your* looks, too, Roger. Do you think that is wrong?"

She glimmered at him with wet eyes above the handkerchief she held over her quivering mouth.

"Oh, no! It can't be."

"But you think—you think if we care for each other's looks so much, and the looks go—that—that—"

"No, I don't think that."

"Yes, you do, Roger! You must be honest with me. You know you think that! Well, I hope I shall die, then,

before my looks go; for if you didn't care for me—"

"Chloe! Do you think it was your looks I fell in love with? You know it wasn't. It was you—*you* behind your looks. Something that was more you than all your looks are. And I believe that my love for you will last forever, just what it is now."

"You are just *saying* that."

"Indeed, I am not. I believe that if people truly love each other—what is best in each other—as we do, their love *cannot* die. I know that you don't care for my looks any more than I care for yours."

She had dried her eyes, but she shook her head wofully, with so tragical a droop of the corners of her mouth that when she said, innocently, "I don't know," Burton broke out laughing, and dropped the reins altogether to catch

her in his arms and kiss the droop out of both the corners. The horse seized a moment favorable for browsing, and drew up as skilfully as if he had been driven to a wayside birch, and began a tranquil satisfaction of his baffled appetite for foliage.

“Poor girl. Now I have made you unhappy?”

“No, no!” she said, laughing and crying at once, and struggling as much to keep herself in his hold as to release herself from it. “I am not unhappy at all. I am excited. And I said as much as you did—I was as much to blame—I put you up to it. I presume I’m crying more to think how miserable I should be if I didn’t trust you so. But if I trust you I am not afraid, and you may go on and say anything.”

“No,” he returned, with a sort of serious joy, “I have nothing more to say.

And perhaps you have got at the answer to the riddle. If we always have faith we shall have love. Or, turn it the other way; it's true that way, too."

He sat, letting her get back her spirits and repair her looks, and he would perhaps not have started of his own motion at all. When she put her handkerchief back into her pocket at last, she said, gently: "Don't you think we'd better drive on, Roger? I'm afraid it's getting late."

He pulled out the burly silver watch whose seal dangled by a black ribbon from his fob.

"It's only eleven, we can easily get back by twelve, if we can only find out where we are, and start right."

She looked out to the right and left, and then stood up and peered around. "I don't seem to know anything here.

It's a judgment on us for talking so, if we're lost!"

"Then yonder's a sign of forgiveness," said Roger, and he pointed with his whip towards the finger-board at the cross-roads a little way in front of them.

"So it is!" she cried, joyfully, and she composed herself in her seat again, while Roger prevailed with the old horse to go so much farther as to bring them in reading range of the finger-board. It pointed with one finger towards the little hamlet or group of houses where Chloe's grandfather lived, seven miles away.

"Dear!" she cried. "I don't see how we ever got so far, or how we came. We shall be dreadfully late to dinner."

"Did they expect us back?" asked the young man.

"I don't know. I presume so. I *did* tell grandfather we might go to

Louisburg. What does it say on the other side?"

He urged the horse a little way round, so as to read on the reverse of the board :

SHAKERS, ONE-HALF MILE.

"Oh, *now* I know where I am!" she exulted. "Did you ever go to a Shaker village?" and she hardly waited for him to say no. "Well, then, it's the greatest thing in the world to see; and I can't think why I didn't bring you here in the first place. I can get grandmother's things here just as well, and a great deal better; I told her that if we went to Louisburg I'd go to the store for her, but now it's all turned out for the best, and I can show you the Shaker village. I used to come here with grandfather when I was little. He did some law business for them. You've surely heard of them, Roger?"

"Oh yes; but I don't remember

what, exactly. Do they have a tavern? Perhaps we could get dinner there."

"Yes; we could. They have no tavern; but they entertain anybody that asks. If you haven't ever been in a Shaker settlement—drive right straight along, Roger—I guess you'll think it the most curious place you were ever in. They think they're like the early Christians; they live all in two or three big families, and own everything together. They came in here from York State, and they say Mother Ann saw the place in a vision before they came."

"Mother Ann?"

"Yes; she's the one that founded them; they believe she had revelations. Folks say they have a little pen on the side of the hill behind the village, and they think they have got Satan shut up in it. Grandfather doesn't believe they think that. They think they are living

the angelic life here on earth, and they dance in their meetings.”

Roger tried to get the horse in motion.

“Well, let us go there, then! I should like to know what the angelic life looks like.”

“Well, if it’s like *that*,” said Chloe, and she laughed as if at some grotesque memory.

“Are they so ridiculous?”

“No. Not always. And I can’t understand folks going to make fun, the way some do. It isn’t dancing exactly, it’s more like marching. And they have preaching, and singing of their own kind that the spirits gave them. It’s a pity it isn’t Sunday, so that we could go to one of their meetings. I don’t know as it’s right to go to a meeting just out of curiosity, though. Do you think it would be?”

“You seem to have done so.”

“Grandfather took me, and I was little; grandmother didn’t like it, even then, I guess. I don’t know whether we better go to the Shakers after all, Roger!”

“But we can’t go to their meeting to-day, you say—”

“No, that’s true. I forgot. And I suppose it will be about the best thing we can do. It’s rather of an old story to me.”

“Then we won’t go, Chloe. I don’t care for it, unless you do.”

“Yes, yes. Go on. I only wanted to know if you really *did* care.”

He shook the reins again and said; “Get up,” and the horse looked round, as if to assure himself that it was he was meant. He made a final snatch at random among the nearest boughs, and came off with his mouth full of pine-needles.

IV

THE grassy-bordered sandy street of the village was silent and empty under the shade of the stiff maples. The lovers drove slowly through, looking out on either side of the chaise for some one to speak with ; but no sign of life showed itself in the dwelling-houses, or in the gardens above or below the thoroughfare, which divided the slope where the village lay. Sounds of labor made themselves vaguely heard from the shops set here and there along the road ; and from farther up the hill-side came the stamping of horses in the great barns.

But there was such a stillness in the air, which muffled these noises, that the

lovers involuntarily sank their voices in speaking together. "I don't know where to go, exactly," said Roger. "I can't find anybody."

"Oh, well, don't let's stop then," Chloe answered. "Let us go right on through. I don't know as I want to stop very much, anyway."

He did not hear her, perhaps, or perhaps his curiosity was now piqued, and he was not willing to go farther without satisfying it. He was craning his neck round the side of the chaise, and looking back at the doorway of one of the buildings.

"I thought I saw some one in that house—at the door."

She looked back, too. "Why, of course! That's the office. I remember it just as well! I don't see what I mean, acting so. Turn right around, Roger! That's where they entertain

strangers. What could I be thinking of?" Her tremor of reluctance, whatever it was from, was past, and she urged him to a feat which had its difficulties. He turned and drove back.

On the threshold of the building where they drove up, a Shaker brother was standing.

"Sir, good-morning!" the young man called politely to him. "Could I put up my horse somewhere? We should like to see the village, if you allow strangers."

"Yee," said the brother. "I will take your horse," and he came down the steps to the horse's head.

Roger helped Chloe out, and he saw that her eyes were red and her cheeks blurred from the tears she had shed. "Wouldn't you like some water?" he whispered; and she gasped back, "Yes."

“Could we get some water inside?”
he asked the brother.

“Yee; you can go into the office with
the young woman. The sisters will give
you some water. I will see to your
horse.”

V

WITHIN, it was all cool and bare and clean. A sister came through the carpetless hallway towards them, and offered to show them into the little parlor beside the door.

Chloe looked at her, and then, after a first timid glance, broke into a smile. "I used to come here with my grandfather, Squire Pullen, when I was a little girl. Don't you remember me?"

"Nay," said the sister, briefly; but she let her eyes wander from the girl's flushing face to the young man's with a demure and not unfriendly interest.

"Well," said Chloe, "we wanted to see the village if we could, and I should

like somewhere to fix my hair; I'm afraid it's coming down."

"I will take you to a room," answered the sister; and she nodded Roger towards the parlor door. "You can go in there."

It was cool and clean, like the hall, and it seemed as bare, though there were chairs and a settee in it, and some hooked rugs on the floor. There was even a looking-glass, and on a table under it were some Shaker books and papers, a life of Ann Lee, and a volume of doctrine. He took this up, and he had it in his hand when Chloe returned with the sister, smiling and flushing, and looking very gay and happy. "This is Mr. Burton," she said. "Mr. Burton, this is Sister Candace."

The sister smiled and stood apart from the pair, looking them over, and taking in the fashion of their worldly dress,

as well as their young beauty. But she did not say anything, and Burton, after a formal profession of his pleasure in making her acquaintance, had to leave the word to Chloe, who kept talking, and would not let him appear awkward. After a moment, the sister said: "I will go and see to the dinner," and then Chloe ran over to Roger, and hurried to say, under her breath: "I had to tell her, because I knew she would guess it anyway; and she knows grandfather, and I didn't want her to think that I would go wandering about with just anybody; I saw she wanted to ask; and she *was* so pleased. I had to tell her all about you, and I don't believe but what she thinks you're pretty nice appearing, Roger. I could tell by the way she looked at you. But, of course, she couldn't say much. Do I look now as if I had been crying any?"

He glanced at her face, turned innocently upon him. "You don't look as if you had ever shed a tear."

"Well, I can't believe I ever did."

"I wish I could believe I hadn't made you."

"Oh, pshaw! You didn't. I was just nervous. I cry too easily. I have got to break myself of it; and you mustn't think it means anything, because it doesn't. Don't you suppose I knew just what you meant? I did, perfectly well, all the time." She put out the hand that was next him, and gave his a little clutch, and after that she began to talk in a very loud voice about the things in the room. From time to time she dropped her voice, and once she explained in an undertone that she had asked Sister Candace whether they could have dinner. "I didn't know but you would hate to ask," and Roger said,

gratefully, yes; and he was much obliged to her.

“You know, I’m so used to their ways; or I used to be; but I could see how it took you aback when they said just yea and nay, to you. You mustn’t mind it; they do it because the Bible says to. They do say yee, but that’s just the way they pronounce it.”

She patronized him a little from the pinnacle of her early familiarity with the Shakers, and explained what the office was, and how it was for business and the reception of visitors from the world outside.

“Then you don’t suppose they will let us go into their family houses,” he said, rather disappointedly.

“Why, I’ll ask Sister Candace when we’re at dinner,” Chloe answered, consolingly. “I don’t believe they

let everybody, but I guess they'll let us. They think so much of grandfather."

VI

AN old man came out of the doorway across the hall, and looked in upon them. "Is this Friend Pullen's granddaughter?" he asked. He had a shrewd face, but kindly, and he spoke neatly, with a Scotch accent.

"Yes!" cried Chloe. "And I remember you, Elder Lindsley. You haven't changed at all since I used to come here with grandfather. Did you know me?"

"Nay," said the elder. "They told me in the office. I am very pleased to see you. You are quite a young woman." He spoke to her, but his eyes wandered to Roger.

Her's followed them, and she said:

“This is Mr. Burton, Elder Lindsley ; and we’re—he’s never been in a Shaker village before—and I thought—he teaches the academy at Birchfield—and do you suppose we could go into some of the family houses?”

“Oh yee,” the old man answered, and he gave Roger his hand. “We shall be very pleased to have you. They said that you were engaged to be married to the young woman.”

“My !?” answered Chloe, “has she told already !” and she laughed, while Roger blushed, and mumbled a confession of the fact.

“Well, you must come and see how we live in our families without being married.”

“I have been reading something about your system here,” said Roger, and he looked down at the volume of doctrine on the table.

“I suppose it appears strange to you,” the elder returned. “But we try to live as Jesus Christ lived in all things. If you are a teacher, you will have read a great many books—”

“Not so very many,” Roger interposed, modestly.

“And you will know that we are not so singular in our way of life as the folks around us have imagined. We are of an order which has appeared in every religion.”

“Yes, I know,” the young man admitted. “It is the same principle that has led men out of the world in all ages. I understand that.”

“Yes. The inspiration of the angelic life has never ceased, and you find its effect in the celibacy of the Buddhists as well as the Roman Catholics, and the Essenes of the Hebrews.”

VII

CHLOE looked at Roger with a novel awe for him as one to whom such esoteric things could be intelligibly spoken. Perhaps a little fear mingled with her pride; they removed him from her, and she brightened when, after the talk got farther away, Sister Candace appeared at the parlor, and brought her the hope of getting it back to familiar ground again.

The elder said promptly, "I hope you have asked the young friends to stay to dinner with you, Candace."

"Nay," said the Sister. "But we have got them dinner."

"They must be your guests," said the elder.

“GIVE TO HIM THAT ASKETH”





“Yee; we shall be much pleased,” she returned.

“And after dinner,” he said to Roger, “some of the Sisters will show the young woman and yourself through the family houses. We shall see each other again before you go.”

He went out, and the lovers followed the Sister to a stairway descending to a basement at the end of the hall. Roger looked round after the old man. The Sister explained to his returning glance, “Elder Lindsley eats in the church-family house. He is one of the ministers.”

She took her guests into a room where a table was laid with such simple and wholesome abundance that Chloe cried out at the sight: “Why, you look as if you had been expecting us for a week, Candace!”

“We are always expecting some one,”

said the Sister. "At least, we are always prepared."

"Do you mean," the young man demanded, "that you give meals to any who come to you?"

"Yee. Give to him that asketh," the Sister returned.

They seemed to be alone in the room with her; but if Chloe looked round, it was to glimpse, at a half-opened door, some vanishing face which had been fixed upon herself or on Roger.

When Sister Candace had placed them at table, and gone out to get their dinner in the kitchen adjoining, it was not she who returned, but another Sister, and it was still a third who came to take the things away.

VIII

THE same curiosity followed them or went before them in the dwellings they visited, after they had finished their dinner, and the officer-Sisters delivered them over to the other Sisters. Some rumor of their relation to each other seemed to have spread through the quiet community, and stirred it from its wonted calm. Perhaps some of them remembered Chloe when she was a little girl, and used to visit them with her grandfather. Perhaps it was enough that any young girl should be among them with the young man she was going to marry. They were met everywhere by more Sisters than sufficed to show them through the huge dwellings,

which they explored in every part, with joyful outcry from Chloe at the perfection of all the domestic appointments, apparent to her house-keeping instincts. She made Roger notice how sweet and clean the white-scrubbed floors were ; how the windows shone, and not a speck of dust rested on chair or table, or even quivered in the pure air, which it was a pleasure to breathe. In the kitchen she said she should like to spend her whole life in such a place. She questioned the Sisters about their way of doing their work, and their preserving and pickling.

From her superabundant joy in her own fate she flattered them in theirs, and pretended to wish she, too, could have such a room as many they saw, appointed for two Sisters to dwell together, with two white beds, two rocking-chairs, two stands, and a sturdy wood stove, and rugs over the spotless

floors. She should like nothing better, she sighed, with a sweet hypocrisy; and she would not appear conscious of her interest for the Sisters, singly or in groups, whom they met, and who greeted or pursued her with their eager eyes, as she came up and passed by, in silent homage to a girl who was engaged to be married, and who would be important from that fact to women anywhere, let alone in a place where nobody ever got married. She put Roger forward when he was not sufficiently evident. She laughed to him in pleasure with this or that; she made jokes to him, and coquetted for him with the Sisters.

In one of the great rooms where the family meetings were held, she tried the spring of the floor which had been laid for the marching or dancing of the Shaker worship; and as she stood in the centre of the place, with her slender

arms stretched out, and her reticule dangling from one wrist, and looked down to find her little feet beneath her deep ruffles, perhaps she knew that she made a charming picture, and wished to be envied.

It was at this moment that the old minister who had preached joined the group at the door, and smiled at her over the shoulders of the Sisters. The little involuntary flutter among them spread electrically to her. She quailed in a deprecation half sincere, half saucy.

“Nay,” the old man called to her. “It is no harm. Wouldn’t you like to be a Shaker Sister, and dance here with us?”

“In this dress?” she cried, putting its worldly prettiness in evidence.

“Yee, if you chose. As long as you wished to wear it we should not object.”



“SHE TRIED THE SPRING OF THE FLOOR”



“Oh, I never believed the Shakers were so wicked,” she said, audaciously; and now she left her place, and came and sheltered herself next her lover, who was standing near the minister.

“I was wondering,” the old man said, still smiling kindly upon her, “whether you would like to look at the barns and shops and gardens. You have seen how we live; you should see how we work.”

“No, I am too tired,” she began, with a glance at Roger.

“Then the young man would like to come?” the minister suggested.

“Very much; I should like to come very much, indeed. And I should like to talk with you a little more about your life here!”

Roger had not spoken with so much energy before; there was almost passion in his voice, so that she looked at him in surprise.

A shadow of vexation passed over her face, but left it fond again.

“Well, then, I will wait for you in the office. But you mustn’t be very long. They will wonder what has kept us so, at grandfather’s.”

“We will go as far as the office with you,” said the minister. “It is on our way. I must see the office Sisters, and give them their charges about not trying to make a Shaker of you. They are great hands for gathering folks in.”

“Oh, I will look out for that!” the girl mocked back.

“Well,” said the old man, soberly, “I should like to have you realize that we are just a large family of brothers and sisters, and nothing else. There is nothing unnatural about us when you come to know us truly.”

“I don’t think there’s anything strange about you, Elder Lindsley,”

said the girl, affectionately. "I used to want to be a Shaker Sister, when I was little, and came here with grandfather; and to-day it's brought it all back. I know that you are just like brothers and sisters, and more so than the real ones oftentimes; and if—if— I know you think you are living the true life, and I only hope you won't look down on us too much, if we can't." She laughed, but the elder replied seriously:

"Nay, you mustn't think we look down on marriage, or condemn it; that is a mistake that the world outside often makes concerning us. Jesus did not marry, but he made the water wine at a marriage feast. He said that in Heaven there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and Ann taught by her example that there could be no angelic life in marriage, but in freedom from marriage; the angelic life could

begin before death as well as after death. We do not say that marriage is wrong; and we know that there are many happy marriages, which are entered into from pure affection. I am sure we all wish and hope that yours will be so."

"Oh, thank you, Elder Lindsley. We are both going to try to be good, and if we are *not* happy—well, it won't be Roger's fault."

The old man smiled at the gay tears that came into the eyes she turned on her lover. But he resumed with increasing earnestness: "If it were my place to advise you—"

"Yes, yes! It is!"

"Or, if I were to counsel with you, I should warn you against the very strength of your affection. The love that unites young people cannot keep its promise of happiness. It seems to

give all, but it really asks all. The man and the woman suppose that they love one another unselfishly; but it is the very life of such love that each should be loved again; and this is not the law of heavenly love. If any one will prove the truth of what I say, let him think of what comes into the heart of the man or woman who loves, and doubts if he or she be equally loved again."

"Yes," said the girl. "That is what I have often thought, and I know that it is selfish. But we can make it unselfish; and we are going to. That is, each one is going to try to live up to a higher rule."

The minister passed this vague expression of a vague aspiration. "All we say of Shakerism is that it is a city of refuge from self. It welcomes all who would be at peace; it gives rest. You must not think that we are not

men and women of like nature with others, and that it has cost us nothing to renounce the Adamic order of life. We have had our thoughts and longings for wife and husband and children, and the homes they build. Nay, several among us have known all the happiness that the marriage relation can give, and have voluntarily abandoned it for the gospel relation. At the same time, as I said before, we do not condemn marriage. Marriage is the best thing in the world, but not the best thing out of the world. Few things are more pleasing to us than the sight of a young couple living rightly in their order; and we honor, as much as any one, a father and mother dwelling together at the end of a long life, with their children and their grandchildren around them. Only, even in those cases, we remember that marriage is earthly and

human, and our gospel relation is divine."

"Oh yes, indeed!" said the girl, generously.

They were at the office-gate, where Roger and the minster left her. "I won't be long," Roger said. She looked round over her shoulder, after they turned away, and caught her lover looking back. She swept the environment with a lightning glance, and then flung him a swift kiss, and demurely mounted the office-steps and went indoors.

IX

BURTON did not return for a long while, and Chloe, where she sat in talk with the office Sisters, made excuses for him from time to time. At last she saw him through the window at the office-gate. Elder Lindsley had come back with him, but he seemed to be taking leave of him there; and she heard him saying: "It is something that requires serious reflection. It is not to be decided rashly."

"I shall do nothing rash," the young man replied. "But if I see the truth—"

The old man lifted his hand in a sort of deprecation, and walked away. Roger came up the steps and into the parlor, with a face that made the girl laugh.

“I don’t wonder you’re scared,” she began. “But if it’s late, I’m as much to blame as you are, I guess. I didn’t notice till a minute ago that it was nearly four. But now I think we better be going. I don’t know what grandmother will think.”

“I will get the horse,” said Burton, with the same air of distraction.

When they were in the chaise again, and driving away, after as many farewells from her, smiled and nodded at the office Sisters, as he would stay for, she broke out: “Well, I have had the *greatest* time! Don’t you believe, I had to tell the Sisters all about how we first met, and everything! They were just as pleased to know as anybody; and they asked when we expected to be married, and whether we were going to keep house, or stay on with father; and how old you were, and I was; and

whether your father and mother were living, and you belonged to church; and I don't know *what* else! I guess you'll think I was pretty silly to talk with them so; and I don't know but I was; but I saw they did want to know so. They were *real* nice, too; and they did make a set at me, just as Elder Lindsley said they would. They asked me whether I saw anything about their life I didn't like, for they wanted to know oftentimes how it seemed to the world outside; and when I praised it up, and said I didn't see a thing in it that wasn't just as sweet as it could be, and you didn't either, that gave them a chance, and they said the whole family had taken the greatest fancy to us, and why couldn't we come and live with them? I couldn't hardly believe my ears, but they were in dead earnest; they *are* so innocent. I tried to laugh it off; and

I told them we would, maybe, when we were old folks ; but they said they had old folks enough, and they wanted young people to join them. They told me all about Mother Ann, and the persecution they used to suffer, here ; and about their spiritual experiences ; and they talked their doctrine into me good and strong, so that I began to get a little bit frightened, one while ; I didn't know what they would say next. I guess they saw that, because they began to turn the subject. They had lots of stories about the different visitors, and what they seemed to expect to see ; and how they wanted to go all through the dwelling-houses, and couldn't understand how they were just like any other private house. I guess we have been particularly privileged, because they said it was only when they saw folks really cared that they let them go through. They

all admire *you*, Roger," she went on, with a fond look at his dreamy face; "and I guess if they could get hold of you, they wouldn't trouble much about gathering *me* in!" She laughed at her own words, and did not mind his continuing gale. "One of the Sisters said they wanted educated people to help spread the truth among people from the world outside when they came to meeting; and another said that *gone* look in your face made her think of prophesying; but I told her that it was nothing but mooning, and we got into a perfect gale. But if you did join the Shakers, Roger, I guess they'd pet you up enough, and they wouldn't object to all the poetry you were a mind to make. Why, Roger, what *is* the matter?"

"With me?" asked the young man, with a sudden turn towards her.

“Yes; you haven’t spoken a word since we started; and I do believe this is the first time you’ve even looked at me!” There was a little note of indignation in her voice, which was half a tremor of laughter, for though he was staring hard enough at her now, he seemed not to see her. “Has anything happened? Did Elder Lindsley say something you didn’t like? You look as cross as two sticks!”

“I’m not cross,” Burton began. “He said nothing that wasn’t perfectly—”

“Did *he* make a set at *you*, too? I didn’t believe he would, after he warned me so against the Sisters. But didn’t you think he spoke beautifully about marriage—praising it up, the way he did?”

“Praise up marriage!” the young man echoed. “He condemned it.”

“Not at all! He said it was the best

thing in the world. Didn't you hear him say they did not condemn it?"

"Yes, but he said that in the heavenly order—"

"Oh, well, he had to say that because he was a Shaker. He had to defend himself, somehow."

Roger looked at the gay, bright face so close to his shoulder, and whatever he might have answered, he said nothing.

"But I *like* the Shakers," she ran on. "I think they are as nice as they can be; and if folks want to live the way they do, I don't see as anybody has a right to say anything. How sweet the Sisters do look; and so clean! And the Brothers, all of them, with their hair all coming down their necks, that way, and their white collars close up under their chins? But it seems very funny the men should let their hair grow long,"

and the women crop theirs off short. You know they have it cropped off short under their caps?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Yes. Sister Candace said so when I was fixing mine. But she said mine was—she said nicer things about it than *you* ever did, Roger. Why, how absent-minded you *are!* What were you thinking about then—just that very minute?"

"I? I wasn't saying anything!"

"Of course you were not! And I don't believe you were thinking anything either, if the truth was known. What was it you and Elder Lindsley were talking about there at the gate? You said, 'If I see the truth'— I guess the Sisters thought you were going to prophesy!"

"Oh!" Roger came to himself in an outcry which seemed partly a recogni-

tion of the fact, and partly a burst of perplexity. He tried several times to find the next word, but the reins slipped from his hands, and he groped, as if in the dark, for them on the floor of the chaise before he spoke again. "It was something we had been talking about. Why did it seem so strange to you that the Sisters should want us to join them?" He looked at her now steadily, but with the vagueness that was always in his eyes. "Did you think they hadn't a right to do it?"

"Of course they had a right to do it! If they believe they're leading the angelic life, it's only common charity for them to want other folks to lead it too."

He winced a little, as if at a lurking mockery in her answer, but he asked: "And should you blame Elder Lindsley if he had tried to persuade me, as the Sisters tried to persuade you?"

She hesitated a moment. "I don't know as I should." She added, gayly: "But I wish I could have heard what he said, and what you said back."

"And what should you think," he returned, austerely, "if I told you that I said nothing back?"

"I don't understand you, Roger," she answered, with a tender anxiety, and she tried to steal her hand into that hand of his which lay on his knee next to her. But his hand was gathered into a fist, and she failed, and withdrew herself into her corner of the chaise. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he burst out, "that there is no answer to make to them; that their doctrine is right, and their life is right." He seemed to wish to go on, but the impulse that had carried him so far failed him.

She was too Puritan in race to let

him shrink from the logic of his words. "Then you would like to be a Shaker yourself?" she said, gravely; and she looked steadily at him from as great a distance as she could make between them in the chaise.

He held his face doggedly away. "Didn't you tell the Sisters pretty much the same thing?"

"That isn't the question," she answered, more gently. "I told them I saw nothing to blame in their way of life."

"A thing cannot be blameless and yet be an error," he interrupted. "They are right, or they are wrong."

That was logic, too; and she could not gainsay him. In her silence he went on: "Nothing that Elder Lindsley said convinced me; he tried to hold me back. But I saw the truth for myself in the light of the gospel, that shined

round about me suddenly, as it shone round Paul. Those people have found peace—and all the rest of the world is at war. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’ It *must* be that they are right! They live as brothers and sisters—as angels. Yes, it is the angelic life!”

She only repeated, “Then you would like to be a Shaker yourself?”

He did not answer her directly. “I can remember my own father and mother, even. They thought all the world of each other, but they were always disputing and quarrelling; and look around at all the married people! Every house is a scene of contention. Will against will always! Your grandfather and grandmother, who have lived together for fifty years, do they agree? But the Shakers have peace; the kingdom of heaven has come to them on earth.”

“Then you would like to be a Shaker, too,” she repeated again, but less harshly than before.

“I can be nothing without you, Chloc! We should not care less for each other, but—differently. Let us both—I have had this day a vision of the truth, and now I see that all we have thought, all we have hoped, from our—our—love, is a mistake, a snare, a delusion! But there is another love! There are Brothers and Sisters there who were once husbands and wives. I feel bound as much as they were. But we could join the Shakers, and be as free as they are—as the angels are— I have hurt your feelings!”

“Ah,” cried the girl, “you don’t know what you’ve done! It isn’t my feelings you’ve hurt!” And perhaps in these words she meant to express what was otherwise unsayable; the wound to

something deeper than feeling, to her womanhood itself, to what was most sacred and most helpless in it. "Do you expect me to argue with you, Roger? To tell you that I wish to be your wife, if you don't wish to be my husband?"

"No, no! Surely not that! I only wish you to see this step as I do, and to take it with me."

She slowly shook her head, and he added:

"For I can never take it without you!"

"Yes, you can, Roger!" she returned. "And you will, if you are convinced. But are you really, really in earnest? No, you needn't tell me!" She was silent, and then she said, desolately, "Well, I won't stand in your way! I knew I wasn't equal to you—"

"Chloe!"

"And I always thought something

would happen. Oh, I guess I'm punished enough for going to the Shakers with you!"

"It was providential—it was ordered, Chloe. Come back with me, and let us talk it over with them; and then, if you can't see it as I do—"

"You'll give it up, and come away with me? No, thank you, Roger! I won't be a stumbling-block to you, and I would sooner die than— I don't blame you; and I *want* you should go back to the Shakers. Yes, I do! Right now!" She laid her hands upon the reins, and the old horse was only too willing to stop.

"Chloe, I will never go without you!"

"You will never go *with* me. And now, if you have a grain of pity in you, you'll get out, and let me go home alone. I can find the way, if you're not here to blind me. My head's all in a whirl—

I can't take it in! I thought we had the highest claim to each other; and that there was something—something we oughtn't to give up, even for the sake of getting to heaven. 'I wouldn't have done it. But I don't blame you, Roger, if you don't see it so. I can't go to the Shakers with you, but you can go, and I will let you, freely; and if it is on your conscience, I will never have one hard thought of you—and I *wish* you to go.—Oh!" She broke into a passion of grief, which was partly a passion of astonishment, for he rose, as if to obey her, and get down from the chaise.

"Roger, Roger! are you really going to leave me?"

"You said to do it."

"But what shall I do?" she pleaded, piteously. "What shall I say to them at grandfather's?"

“I will stay and take you home; and I will tell them myself. There is no haste. I will go home with you—to your grandfather’s—your father’s. We can go back to Birchfield, and I will tell your father—I will explain to him.”

He had sat down again and taken the reins. She caught them fiercely from him. “Do you think I will let you appear so before them? No! *I* will tell them; *I* will explain! And I will go down on my knees to them in shame. Yes, they were right about you, Roger Burton, and I was the simpleton—to believe in you, to trust you. Oh, I am punished! Are you staying here because you think I will change? If you stay, I will get out myself, and *walk* to grandfather’s.”

“I will not make you walk, but I will follow you”—and now he really dismounted.

“Don’t you dare!” she cried. “Oh, I forgive you, Roger! You don’t know how *much* I forgive you. You can never know.”

She began to moan and to cry; she pulled weakly at the reins, and the old horse started on.

Roger stood in the road and watched the chaise out of sight.

THE Brethren and the Sisters were gathering in the church building for the Sunday morning service. They came from the West Family and the East Family, in little groups of the different sexes, moving silently along the grassy borders of the sandy village street, and they silently issued by ones and twos from the doors of the plain, large buildings of the Church Family, and entered the plain, small church-house, the Sisters in their straight drab gowns and stiff, wire-framed gauze caps, which hid their hair, and the Brothers in their severe suits of gray or brown, their formless trousers and buttonless coats of Quaker cut, and their straggling locks falling to

their necks under their wide-brimmed hats without ribbons. They had set, serious faces, and the little children who paced gravely along beside them—the boys with the men, and the girls with the women—had faces as set and serious as their elders. It was all so still, in the glisten of the morning sun, with those figures tending noiselessly towards one point, that it was like a vision, and they were like spirits.

Within the church-house they took their places in rows, fronting one another—the men on one side and the women on the other; the children were divided, the boys from the girls; and as the neighbor-folk began to come in from the outside, they were assorted in like manner. Among the strangers there were some fashionably-dressed people from a summer resort not far away; they had come in carriages, which they

had left standing in the care of their coachmen along the street ; but they had left the rule of their world there, too, and conformed to the Shaker custom in the Shaker church.

It was some time after the last comer was seated before the Brothers or Sisters made any sign of life. Then one of the Sisters began to sing, and presently they all joined her, the men as well as the women, and softly beat time to their singing on the broad napkins stretched across their knees. When the singing was over, one and another spoke briefly upon any serious thing he or she had in mind. Presently, they all rose and put back their seats against the wall, and, in the space left free, they formed themselves into two irregular circles, and began a brisk march, while they kept time to their chant with a certain joyous gesticulation. The air had a musical

law of its own, with strange and abrupt changes of time, and it ceased with a close as sudden as any of the changes; the dance dissolved; the Brothers went back to their seats against one wall, and the Sisters to theirs against the other.

The Shakers of all ages shared in this rhythmical march. One weighty Sister, indeed, seemed to be excused from it; she sat still, and kept time with her hands to the tune which her feet might not follow with her vast bulk. But she was alone in her exemption; the youngest of the little wards of the family obeyed the music with the same joy and the same tottering step as the tall old man who led the rest in the mystic round. He stooped a little, but his downward face had the beauty of feature which age refines rather than wastes, and the perfect silver of his hair falling to his throat gave his face a patriarchal

dignity. His hands wavered like his feet ; he did not always reach the close of a bar with the rest of the singers ; a rapture, which was like a remembered rapture, appeared through the fatigue which his countenance expressed.

When the Brethren and Sisters were again still in their places, an elderly Brother came forward and delivered a brief homily, mainly directed against the natural propensities in all kinds, but bearing somewhat more severely upon the tea-habit among women, and admonishing all his hearers of the evil consequences of so much hot, unleavened bread as he assumed they were in the custom of eating.

He sat down, and another elderly Brother rose and said : “ The meeting is dismissed.”

THE strangers from the world outside quickly dispersed, until none remained except a young girl and an old lady of those who had driven over from the summer resort, and who lingered until most of the Brothers and Sisters had gone, too. Certain of the younger and stronger Shakeresses had stayed to help out that weighty Sister who had not joined in the dance, and there was a kindly-looking Brother who was waiting for them to get her away before he shut the windows and closed the door. When he came back into the church-house, after giving a hand with the Sister down the steps, he found the old lady and the young girl, who was fretting, with a

very young girl's fear of indecorum :
"What *can* you want to say to him,
grandmamma? *Do* come on!"

The old lady, who was something like a young girl, too, in a ghostly fashion, and had that grace of figure and carriage which often outlasts youth, would not be bidden. She moved up to the Brother and asked: "Was that very old man who led in the marching Roger Burton?"

"Yee. Father Burton we call him. He always leads," said the Brother, with the pride and pleasure humanity feels in the power of any of the race to hold out against time. "On towards ninety now, too!"

"I should like to speak with him," said the old lady, and at this the young girl seemed arrested in another protest by pure astonishment. "I must!"

"Oh nay," returned the Shaker, with

a smile of compassion for the absurdity.

“He’s too old for *that!*”

“I must!” the old lady repeated; and she urged, as if it were a reason: “I used to know him before he joined the Shakers. I have got to see him!”

The Shaker Brother faltered, with his hand on the door, which he could not close because she gave no sign of moving from the doorway either for his purpose or for the impatience of the young lady, who now stood at the foot of the steps outside, prodding the turf with the point of her parasol. He looked out of the doorway, and, to his apparent great relief, he caught sight of the elder who had preached at the meeting. He was going by the church-house, and he stopped a little at sight of the group by the doorway.

“Alfred,” the Brother called to him, “here is a friend says that she has got to see Father Burton!”

XII

THE elder drew near and looked first at the young lady, who rejected the inquiry of his glance, and then at the old lady, who said, eagerly: "I used to know him when I was a girl, before he joined the Shakers, and I live a great ways from here now—I live in St. Louis. I guess if I'm not too old, Roger isn't; and I don't believe but what he'll know me." She smiled brightly, and the elder may have felt her apparitional charm.

"I don't know what to say, exactly. It's not our custom to refuse speech with friends from the world outside. But Father Burton is very old. I question if he'll know you."

“I guess he’ll know me,” said the old lady.

“As long as you’ve come such a great way, I don’t see as we should do right— There! It won’t do him any hurt, I guess. You can go into the office, and I’ll bring him to you, if he isn’t too tired.” He pointed towards a building a little way down the street. “That’s the—”

“Oh, I guess I know where the office is well enough,” chirped the old lady, and she gave a little laugh of triumph.

She sat alone in the office parlor, when the elder came in with Father Burton; her granddaughter, as if anything were better than staying through the reminiscences of the old people when they should come together, said she would go and sit in the carriage until her grandmother was ready. An office Sister, somewhat excited by the

prospect of Father Burton's coming interview with this old lady who had insisted upon seeing him, remained with her.

“He don't see very well,” said Elder Alfred, when he came in with the old man; “but his hearing is about as good as ever it was, and I don't believe you'll have to talk any too loud to him. His mind comes and goes a little, and you have got to look out for that.”

He advanced these cautions, and then, as if he had no further concern in the matter, he left his charge, in the care of the office Sister, to the old lady.

XIII

SHE had ignored his going. She seized one of Father Burton's trembling hands in hers before he could drop into the easy-chair the Sister pulled up for him.

"Roger Burton!" she cried out, "don't you know me?"

"Nay," said the old man.

"Why, I'm Chloe — Chloe Mason, that *was!*"

"Yee," said the old man, with the effect of yielding so much, at least, and he looked at the Sister for further light on the point. He sank into the chair behind him, and the old lady drew hers up beside him, still keeping his hand and talking to him.

“I wanted to see you again, Roger, before we both passed away. I didn’t believe you were living yet; but I happened to get hold of a paper that had a letter in it about a visit to the Family here, and it spoke of you; and nothing would do but I must start right on. I guess they thought I was crazy, but they had to let me come. They were coming to the sea-side anyway, and I just made them stop off at Egerton over Sunday, and let me come here and see you once more before we died, Roger.” She gave a laugh and smoothed his hand between hers.

Father Burton had been working his toothless jaws together nervously, as old men do. Now he leaned forward, and, with a frown of his thick, senile brows, he said: “Chloe Mason that used to live at Birchfield when I taught the academy there?”

“Yes!” crowed the old lady. “I knew you would remember me! I saw it was you the minute I set eyes on you in the march. You a’n’t changed a bit, hardly; you’ve aged some; we all have; and I can see your teeth are gone a good deal, they’ve got to go; but your nose is just the same, and your eyes, and your hair; it’s whiter, of course, but it was always so light-colored. You’ve got beautiful hair, Roger!”

“Let me see,” said the old man. “She was the one that married Ira Dickerman, wa’n’t she?” He bent his frown upon her again, and began to work his lips while he waited her answer.

“I don’t hardly believe he knows what you are talkin’ about,” said the Sister, softly.

“Yes, he does,” rejoined the old lady, with the sharpness of one who will not

suffer a friend to be criticised. "He knows it as well as I do. Don't you know it's Chloe talking to you, Roger?"

"Oh yee," he returned in a tone of dry unconcern.

"There, I told you he did," said the old lady. She turned again to the old man. "Yes, I married Ira about a year afterwards. He made me a good husband, Ira did; I'll never say anything against Ira. He was a master provider, and he looked out for everything. He was pretty forehanded before we left Birchfield in '33, and out west everything seemed to turn into money. He gave up the law, well, I suppose, as much as thirty years before he died, and didn't do anything but look after his property; he lent money some. He died in '56; it's a good while ago, but he outlived all our boys; there was five of them; and the two

girls were married and had families of their own by that time. I've got one of my granddaughters here with me." She looked round for the girl, and then went on: "I guess she's gone out somewhere; she'll be back again. I want you to see her. She's Ira all over; more than any of his own children were; they took after me mostly. He always said he was glad of that. He was very good to me, Ira was; and I didn't have anything to complain of. None of my children ever made me shed a tear as long as they lived. But, oh dear me! Life a'n't what we used to think it was, Roger, when we were young. It was all bright enough for me till we came here that day together. But, there! I haven't ever blamed you, and I wouldn't let *them*—no, not the first syllable! Grandfather was pretty mad that afternoon, when I came home alone. 'Why, is the

fellow crazy?" said he. "Don't you say a word against Roger, grandfather," said I, and then I fell right out of the chaise. Well, I got over it—we get over almost everything in *this* world—and I went back home as soon as I was able; and then, after awhile, Ira began to come round. First, it did seem as if I couldn't bear to look at him; and if it hadn't been for my pride—"

The old man paused from chewing upon nothing, and turned his dim eyes upon her again: "Do I understand that *you* are Chloe Mason that was—Squire Pullen's daughter?"

"Granddaughter," the old lady corrected him. "There," she said to the Sister, "I told you! Yes, I'm Chloe, Roger; and I haven't ever had one hard feeling against you. You did it because you felt that it was right, and you always were a great hand to do

what you thought was right. I tried to express it at the time, but I don't know as I did. I presume you couldn't understand how I felt, although I didn't pass any judgment on you. My! oh my! How it all comes back to me! I was right here, in this very place, with Candace and the other office Sisters—I guess they can't any of them be living now—and you came in after you'd been with Elder Lindsley, and you looked so strange I wanted to laugh; I thought you were scared because you'd stayed so long. But I guess I didn't want to laugh after we got started on the way home, and you began to tell me how you felt, and asked me to join the Shakers with you. First, I thought you must be joking, and then I thought you must have taken leave of your senses; and when I found out you meant it, I didn't know what *to* think.

It hurt me, Roger, more than a man could ever understand. It made me feel as if I was draggin' you down, and if I couldn't see it as you did, I was kind of — well — low - minded ; I don't express it very well *now*, and I couldn't begin to express it *then*. But it made it seem as if everything that we had thought so beautiful and lovely was disgraceful, somehow. And all the while I knew, just as well as I know now, that it *wa'n't* ; but I didn't know how to say so ; and I felt as if you were putting the whole burden on me, and I couldn't bear it. When I saw that you really meant it, all I wanted was to get you out of my sight. I didn't blame you, and I didn't hate you ; I don't know as I can explain it, but it seemed as if I should go crazy the next minute if you stayed with me and tried to talk with me, and I couldn't tell you how I felt—

and I *couldn't*. That was what made me make you get out of the chaise right off. I used to turn over what you did, and *turn* it over, and try to think whether I had done right or not; and whether I couldn't have made you see it as I did, if I'd tried. But you know I *couldn't* try, don't you, Roger? You know how it is when we've lost friends—how you go back to this point and that, and try to patch up some way they would have lived, if you had done so and so? Well, it was just like that! But, afterwards, I was glad I hadn't tried to persuade you, or even let you go home to grandfather's and talk it over with him. It wouldn't have been any use, and I was spared *that* much, anyway."

The old man did not answer anything, and the Sister murmured: "I guess you'll have to speak a little louder to him."

He roused himself and turned towards the old lady. "Did you come from Squire Pullen's now?" he asked.

She laughed. "Grandfather's? Why, he's been dead fifty years! That's like you, Roger! Just so absent-minded! *Have* you kept on here in the Family, living in a kind of waking dream as you used to?"

"I guess so," said the old man, with an air of fatigue.

"I guess he's beginning to get tired," the Sister hinted.

The old lady did not heed her. "Well, life's a dream whether you take it sleeping or waking, it don't matter much which way you take it; and I guess you got as much good out of it your way as any. I've had dreams by night that are a good deal more like real things to me than the things that really happened. Don't it seem like a

dream to you, our ever coming here together?"

"Yee," said the old man, indifferently.

"But you remember it, don't you, Roger?" she entreated.

"Yee. I came here with a young woman I was engaged to be married to."

"Well, I was the one! Don't you know me? I'm Chloe!"

"Why, so you are! Why, you're Chloe! Yee, yee, I know you now. But first off—"

"Yes; I don't wonder. It's more than sixty years ago. I'll be eighty next August, and I was eighteen then."

"And what did you say we came here for?" He sank his voice to a confidential whisper.

"Just to see the place! And you liked it so much you wanted to stay, and I

—let you. You remember about that?" The old man shook his head. "Yes, you do! You remember me? Chloe?" He shook his head again. She gave a little cry of grief and reproach. "You did, a minute ago!"

"I guess he's getting pretty tired," said the Sister, more boldly.

"Tired?" the word seemed to vex him. "If you Sisters would leave my bed the way I fix it myself, and not meddle with it afterwards, I shouldn't get so tired fixing it over again, and I should be much obliged to you." He turned to Chloe and explained, "They know as well as anybody that I like to have a hollow down the middle, so as to keep me from rolling from side to side; but they *will* flatten it *out*. What did you say became of the girl?"

"What girl?"

"The one he came here with."

“Why, I’m the one, and you’re Roger, that she came with.”

“Yee; I’m Roger,” said the old man, after a moment’s reflection. “But I thought she was young—”

The old lady gave a gay laugh: “Well, *I* was young, too, when I came here with you.”

“Ah, just so!” said the old man.

She waited for him to speak further; but he did not, and she said, compassionately: “We a’n’t either of us as young as we were.”

“I was as spry as anybody till I had the rheumatism,” he remarked, vaguely. He lifted his head and stopped working his jaws, and looked at her with eyes that again had a gleam of recognition in them. “And you say she made out pretty well?”

“Yes,” returned the old lady, “I don’t know as I ever had a thing happen to

me that *he* could have helped. He was always just *so* to me. We had a pretty large family of children, as I was saying just now, and we lost most of them. *That* was what hurt the most, I guess; it 'most killed *him* to have them go. But the two girls married well, and their husbands are both good men, and they've got pretty children, and if I was *two* grandmothers it would be all right; then they could both have me with them." She smiled fondly, proudly; and then her face sobered again. "Yes, I've been through it all, Roger. I've had the best that earth could give, and I've seen my children round me, and now my grandchildren; and yet I don't know, Roger, but what I'd have done as well to stay here with you that day. What do you think?" She leaned forward and took his old hand again between her aged palms, and softly caressed it. "You've

been here ever since, and you've lived the angelic life, and you've had peace. You've escaped all the troubles of this world. You haven't had a wife to pester you; and you haven't had to go down into the grave with your children, and want to stay there with them, when they died before you. You haven't seen your partner die by inches before your eyes. Your days have flowed right on here, with no sorrow and no trouble; you've done what you thought was right, and you've had your reward. Do you think I'd better have stayed with you that day?"

The question, the caressing touch, apparently brightened him into consciousness of her again. He laughed, as if it all affected him humorously. "Yee, I've lived the angelic life, as you say, and it's been all I ever expected. I've had peace, I don't deny that, and I haven't had any

sorrow or trouble; and still, I'm not sure but I'd have done about as well to go with *you*, Chloe."

He lifted his countenance upon her for a moment of full recognition. In the next he lost her. His face darkened, and he asked: "Do you know any of the Sisters in the Family house over there?"

"I used to know them," the old lady returned, tremulously, "when I was a little girl."

"Well," said the old man, and he got stiffly to his feet, "I want you to tell them that if they smooth out that hollow in my bed—"

XIV

THE young girl showed her impatient face at the doorway, and asked: "Isn't it almost time for us to be going, grandmother?"

"Yes, it's time," said the old lady. "I guess Roger and I have about got through."



THE END

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